

# Emergency responders train for mass casualty MEDEVAC

Story and photos by Cpl. G. Lane Miley

**CAMP LEMONIER, Djibouti** – Flashing red lights and sirens broke the silence of the sultry African night here May 5, as personnel from U.S. Marine Forces Central Command-Djibouti and Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa conducted a mass casualty drill under the full moon.

During the exercise, MARCENT-Djibouti's Expeditionary Medical Unit tested its capabilities to dispatch a medical crew on board a plane, retrieve multiple injured personnel and then further test the EMU's ability to offload and triage the victims at the camp's clinic.

Lt. Cmdr. Christopher E. Schmidt, an emergency room nurse practitioner, said the sailors put together a team with emergency aviation experience to fly out, triage and treat the injured while in flight.

The drill began with a call to CJTF-HOA's Joint Operations Center requesting medical assistance following a simulated combat incident that resulted in eight casualties. A Marine KC-130 was dispatched with EMU medical assets to retrieve the injured. The call was then relayed from the JOC to MARCENT-Djibouti's Quarterdeck about an hour out from the plane's arrival. From there, the Command Duty Officer sounded a verbal alarm over the camp's public address system, alerting doctors and corpsmen from the EMU to report to their battle stations. At the EMU they were advised of the inbound injured personnel and given a chance to prepare the facility for the coming patients.

"I've pulled a lot of emergency phone calls with air traffic control, so I'm used to the checklist," said Staff Sgt. James B. Thacker, who served as the MARCENT-Djibouti Command Duty Officer during the drill. The York, Pa., native took the call at the Quarterdeck and dispatched emergency vehicles to the flight line. He arrived here recently and will serve as MARCENT's air traffic control chief. He previously worked with the Provost Marshall's Office, which also gave him experience dealing with emergencies.

An emergency medicine physician and an emergency medicine nurse on board triaged the downed troops, situating the Marines on stretchers inside the bird according to their injuries, with the worst injuries near the plane's back door for immediate offload.

Corpsmen from the EMU and vol-



unteer Marine litter bearers headed to the flight line as soon as the call came in to transport their fallen comrades to the EMU. The flashing red lights atop Kellogg, Brown and Root fire trucks and the EMU's ambulances cut through the thick, hot night across the camp.

When the first responders arrived, they could hear the loud screams of mock casualties echoing from the plane.

As Chief Petty Officer Michael T. Shull rode to the flight line in the ambulance, he said he really enjoys the fast pace of the drill and honing the sailors' skills. He said having the volunteers dressed for the occasion with simulated blood and other special effects makeup helps make the scenario more believable and gets everyone involved moving more quickly. The Maple Grove, Minn., native served as the triage officer for the event and wore a reflective yellow belt so the treatment team would recognize him as the "go-to man" on the ground.

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(Above) Lance Cpl. Allen J. Chappetta calls for a doctor during a night mass casualty drill May 5 as Seaman Joaquin M. Holmes, a corpsman with the Expeditionary Medical Unit, gives medical attention to another mock, simulated patient. (Left) Lt. Cmdr. Christopher E. Schmidt, an emergency room nurse practitioner with the EMU, explains the triage process to fire fighters here during a night mass casualty drill. (Below) A sailor with the EMU here closes an ambulance's doors as one of the last mock casualties is loaded into the vehicle during a night mass casualty drill. (Bottom) Lance Cpl. James W. Salley serves as a mock, simulated patient during the night mass casualty drill.

